



Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



Gamefish Tagging News July 2015

2014–15 gamefish season

The New Zealand gamefish season ended on 30 June. Anglers and clubs should send in all completed tag cards to the address below, if they have not already done so. The season was notable for the return of yellowfin tuna across a range of sizes in modest but encouraging numbers and more success targeting swordfish. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council would like to encourage fishers to tag and release these species once the novelty of catching one has worn off.

Marlin fishing was sporadic but generally on a par with 2013-14 on the east coast. Fishing on the west coast was very good at times. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council is committed to tagging 50% of striped marlin and encourages all anglers to tag fish less than 90 kg. A few private boats ventured to the Wanganella Banks again this year and tagged quite a few striped marlin. There have been two tag returns from fish previously tagged at the Wanganellas, both in Australian waters.

There have been some large yellowtail kingfish tagged this season, and while tags cards are still coming in, the average size and number of kingfish appears to be up. A kingfish monitoring project has been running this year, collecting length and age data from the recreational catch. This will give a good indication of the state of kingfish stocks in the northeast of New Zealand and will be compared to a similar study in 2010.

Tag recaptures

So far in 2014–15 there were 30 tagged kingfish recaptured, 2 striped marlin, 1 mako shark. Reports from commercial fishers overseas can often take a couple of months to arrive so these are provisional numbers. The time at liberty for tagged fish ranged from one day to more than 6 years, and the distance between release and recapture ranged from 0 to 510 nautical miles.

A striped marlin tag was found washed up on a Charlesworth beach near Coff's Harbour, Australia. It is possible that this fish travelled across the Tasman from Wanganella Banks where it was tagged. It is open to speculation as to how the tag washed up on the beach. It clearly could not have drifted the whole way across to Australia, and was in remarkably good condition, indicating that it had probably come off the fish fairly close to where it was found. There is unfortunately no way of knowing if this happened due to natural processes or if the tag was

removed from the marlin by human hands. This is the second striped marlin tag recovered from fish tagged by New Zealand recreational vessels on the Wanganella Banks.

Another striped marlin was recaptured on King Bank on 5 April 2015 from the charter boat *Pursuit*. This fish had been tagged north of Piha from the boat *Mindoro* on 25 February. It had been at liberty for 39 days and was recaptured 230 nautical miles north east of the tagging location. This fish was re-tagged and released a second time.

There were also a couple of reports of tagged striped marlin being caught this year where the tags were not recovered from the fish or the number recorded before the fish were released again. This is disappointing as the whole objective of tagging marlin is to achieve recaptures, and by so doing learn more about these remarkable creatures. The first priority when a marlin bearing a tag is caught should be the recovery of the tag – even if it means the fish has to be taken on board as a last resort.

Kingfish recaptures

As usual, the majority of the tag returns this season have come from kingfish. Some of the notable recoveries follow.

A kingfish that had been at liberty for four years was caught in January near Volkner Rocks. It measured 125cm fork length and weighed 28.4kg. It had been tagged nearby, west of White Island from *Pursuit* at which time it measured 110cm fork length and was estimated to have weighed 17kg. This represents an increase in length of 15cm and an increase in weight of around 11.4kg in four years.

In March 2015 a kingfish that had been at liberty for 4 years 9 months was recaptured off Cavalli Islands. It measured 115cm and was weighed on board at 16kg. This kingfish had been tagged in June 2010 in the central Bay of Islands. It measured 75cm with an estimated weight of 6kg at that time. Therefore it had grown 40cm and increased about 10kg in weight. It was just 15 nautical miles between release and recapture.

A tagged kingfish was caught by Barry Grovier while fishing for groper in 200 metres of water off Mokau, Taranaki. Remarkably this fish was tagged 6 years 4 months earlier at the Ranfurly Bank by Scott Tindale fishing from Oracle. It weighed 20.4kg on recapture and had grown about 12cm and 9.4kg while at liberty. The shortest distance by sea is 510 nautical miles via Cook Strait. A few kingfish tagged at Ranfurly have moved north and others south in the past so there is no knowing what route this fish took.

Another notable kingfish was recaptured at the King Bank on 5 March 2015. It was estimated to weigh a whopping 48kg. The tag was removed and the fish released to fight another day. The tag report card for this fish has not been handed in, but the tag was one of a batch that was issued to the Bay of Islands Swordfish Club in 2002. Efforts to track down the release details for this fish have so far been unsuccessful. Due to the size of this kingfish it is likely to have been tagged some years ago but sadly there is no way of knowing for sure. This reinforces the need to be really particular about returning all completed tag report cards to your fishing club or to Blue Water Marine Research either direct or via the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI).

Reporting releases

Every year we have recaptures where the tag report card is missing. This is frustrating and a waste of effort all round. Tagging is of no value unless the card is completed and returned. Many cards are only partly filled in or illegible. If your fish is recaptured but you have not provided enough information, including your full address, you might miss out on finding out about your fish, and the reward. Hand your completed tagging cards into your fishing club or post them to:

Gamefish Tagging

Ministry for Primary Industries

PO Box 19747

Auckland 1746.

New Zealand

Reporting recaptures

If you recapture a fish with a tag, please provide all the same information you record when filling out a tag card on release. If possible, measure kingfish by laying them flat on a measuring board. There is a strong possibility that they were accurately measured before release, so we need an accurate measurement on recapture as well. There are incentives to report tag recaptures. These include:

- 1. \$500 lucky draw each year for a fisher who returns a tag and all information**
- 2. A reward shirt for each angler who tags a fish that gets recaptured**
- 3. A polo shirt with GameTag logo for the angler who reports a tag recapture**
- 4. Recapture letter to anglers and skippers involved with release and recapture**

More information is available on the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council website.

<http://www.nzsportfishing.co.nz>

Thanks to the Ministry for Primary Industries who fund data management and reporting; the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council which purchases and distributes the tags; and Blue Water Marine Research who are contracted to manage the database.